NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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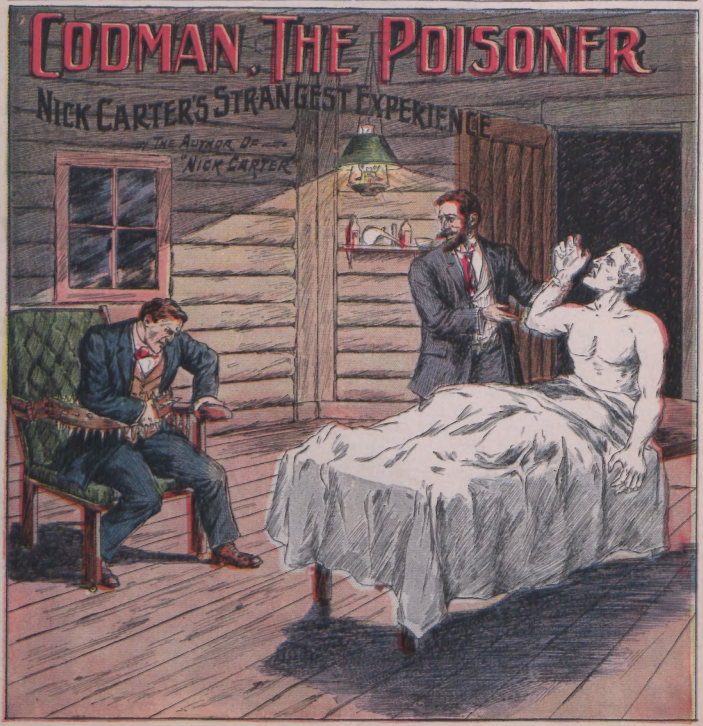
No. 514 NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 3, 1906. Price, Five Cents

CODMAN, THE POISONER

NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST EXPERIENCE

By the Author of the "Nick Carter" Stories



When Nick sought to raise himself from the chair the sharp clawlike points pricked into his flesh when he persisted in his efforts.

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Codman, the Poisoner;

OR,

Nick Carter's Strangest Experience.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE POISONER'S DESPERATE ACT.

A patrol-wagon belonging to the police department of a town in Westchester County, New York State, drew up and came to a stop in front of the jail at half-past eleven o'clock on the night of the tenth of June.

There were two policemen on the front seat of the wagon; there was a third one who stood upon the step at the rear, and there was still a fourth, who was inside with the prisoners, of which there were five in number.

Each of these prisoners was securely handcuffed, and in order to make assurance doubly sure the handcuffs had been so arranged that the prisoners were chained together in one continuous line, the most desperate and dangerous one being in the middle; that is, there were two of his confederates on either side of him.

And this desperate and dangerous criminal was Doctor Codman,* the "Master Poisoner," the "Poison Doctor," the "Physician Fiend," as he was variously called by those who had come in contact with him.

The doctor was wanted, and badly wanted, in New York. There were various crimes charged against him, not the least of which was attempted murder.

Nick Carter had just completed a case which had culminated in the arrest of the doctor, who had sought to win for his own the neat sum of five million dollars; and in his efforts to accomplish this feat he had abducted a young man named Collin Graeme, and had at the same time sought to poison Graeme's twin sister, Nancy.

Codman was little less than a fiend in human guise. His knowledge of drugs and poisons was phenomenal—almost uncanny.

He had resurrected from the forgotten past all the dreadful knowledge of the Borgias and of the Venetian poisoners, and he had formulas of his own which were totally unknown to the science of the present day, and which defied all the efforts of chemists and scientists to analyze them.

His last feat had been to administer a drug to Nancy

*For the beginning of the career of Doctor Codman, read No. 512 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY—"A Game of Five Millions."

Graeme which had had the effect of inducing a condition which so perfectly counterfeited death that, after taking it, she had at first been pronounced dead by the leading physician of New York City.

And yet this great physician discovered something which made him doubt, and the consequence had been that Nancy was taken to his own house instead of to the mausoleum of her family in the cemetery.

There, under the constant care and watchfulness of Doctor Stagg, she had recovered after the lapse of a week.

But Codman, the poisoner, had believed that she was in the vault in the cemetery, and on this particular night of the tenth, already referred to, he had gone there with his four companions to take her away; and it was while he was carrying out this plan that he was arrested, after a hard fight, by Nick Carter.

The arrests made, and the prisoners turned over to the local police, Nick Carter felt that his own part of the duty was done, and accordingly with his assistants and Doctor Stag—who had accompanied the detective on the expedition—he had entered his automobile and started for his own home after assuring the captain of the local police that officers from New York would be sent out after the prisoners in the morning.

And now we will return to the patrol-wagon and its occupants.

When it drew up in front of the jail, the policemen on the front seat got down and went around to the rear of the wagon, where the third officer was awaiting them. At the same time two more officers appeared at the front door of the jail, and stood there idly, waiting to have a look at the prisoners.

Then the prisoners filed slowly out of the wagon with the remaining officer behind them, and in this way they were led inside the office of the jail, which was also the station-house for the police.

For the benefit of those who have never witnessed a ceremony of this kind it should be explained that, when prisoners are brought into the station-house in this manner, they are lined up in front of a high desk behind which the captain or a sergeant is seated.

The sergeant then takes the name and pedigree of each prisoner, which he enters in a book called a blotter, and as he finishes with each one an officer steps up behind that man and immediately searches him; and whatever is found upon his person is taken from him and put away for safe keeping.

It will therefore be understood why these prisoners had not been searched when they were captured. In the first place, it was not thought necessary, since they were all handcuffed together, and could do nothing even if they were armed.

Just now, as they were lined up in front of the desk, it will be remembered that the poisoner was in the middle.

He was rather taller than his companions, and there was a litheness about his build and carriage which somehow suggested the leopard.

He was a remarkable-looking man, too. His skin was so white that, in contrast with his coal-black hair and black-pointed beard, it looked almost waxen; and his big, somber, black eyes, set unusually wide apart, were coldly cruel in their expression.

He was a handsome man if one could forget the Satanic suggestion in his face; and it was known that he possessed wonderful strength; strength as great as Nick Carter's, in fact. He had only just demonstrated that fact in his fight with Nick Carter, and although the detective had succeeded in overcoming him and gaining the victory, it had been accomplished by a trick rather than by superior strength.

There was a cold smile on Doctor Codman's face when he confronted the sergeant at the desk; a smile in which his eyes took no part, and which showed his white and gleaming teeth menacingly.

The five prisoners were directly in front of the desk, against the iron rail that was there—and Codman was in the center.

Directly behind them, perhaps five feet to the rear and lined up in almost the same positions as the prisoners, were five policemen; the four who had been with the patrol-wagon and one of those who had stood in the doorway as it approached the jail; the sixth was the sergeant who was now behind the desk.

It will be well for the reader to get these positions thoroughly in his mind in order to understand just what happened two minutes later—just as the sergeant opened his mouth to begin the questions he was required to ask.

There was a short interval of utter silence in the room, during which the sergeant studied the faces of the prisoners. Then he drew the blotter toward him, opened it, and began with the first one on his left.

"What is your——" he commenced; but he got no further than that, for at that instant the shackles fell from Codman's wrists as if they had never been fastened there at all.

He started backward, and wheeled in his tracks as the irons fell from him, and as he did so he drew something —it was a large rubber bulb—from his coat pocket, and, waving it around his head and pressing it with all the strength in his hand, the room instantly became filled with a fine spray which seemed to penetrate to every corner of it at once.

The officers who saw Codman's first move, and who attempted to seize upon him or to get their own weapons into play, were instantly blinded by that terrible spray. Their hands flew to their eyes, and they cried out, and cursed and screamed in agony.

By whirling as he did, the doctor sent the terrible spray into every part of the room, and not only the

officers who stood behind him received the effects of it, but also the sergeant behind the desk, and even the poisoner's companions in crime.

In their agony they screamed aloud; many of them fell to the floor, where they writhed and twisted in exquisite torture.

If they could have seen Codman—which they could not—they would have noticed that, the instant when he raised that bulb on high and pressed it, he crouched low down, and that he not only closed his own eyes tightly, but he pressed his left hand over his nostrils and mouth.

Then, as the men fell around him like flies, he leaped away from them toward the door.

With a bound he was through it and in the street. With another he was beside the patrol-wagon. A third took him to the driver's seat, where he seized reins and whip, and in another instant he was dashing down the street with the horses in a mad run; and there wasn't anybody who saw that wagon pass who thought to stop it or hinder it, for was it not the police patrol-wagon? It was nothing strange to see that dashing through the streets at a mad gallop.

It may as well be explained here that on the following morning the patrol-wagon was discovered at the side of the road three miles out of town. The harness was piled upon the ground beside it, but the horses had disappeared.

Later, however, they also were found—by the police in the city of New York; and so it was pretty certain that the doctor had ridden them bare-back to the city that night, after removing their harness.

At the station-house, after the doctor had sprayed that terrible poison around the room in order to make good his escape, nobody thought of anything but his own agony for a long time.

It was as if each one there had been seared across the eyeballs by white-hot irons; as if the eyes themselves had been torn from their sockets; and the effect of the poison upon their nostrils, and lips, and throats was almost as agonizing.

Nobody could speak. They could only cough, and scream, and groan, and writhe in agony on the floor.

And the men who had been the companions of Codman, the men who were arrested with him, and who were therefore accessories to the crimes he had committed, were in every bit as bad a plight as were the policemen.

There were four of them now, each two being still handcuffed together.

And they had no thought of making any attempt to escape. Their agony was too intense. They were suffering too horribly.

In the midst of this unprecedented scene a passing milkman stopped at the door, and ran inside to see what was the matter.

No one could tell him; none could even see him; but he was a man of resource, and he hurried back to his wagon and brought inside the station-house one of his cans of milk.

There was a wash-bowl in one corner of the room. He filled the bowl with the milk and soaked the towel in it, and with that he washed the eyes of the suffering men; he forced them to drink large quantities of the milk, and gradually the agony of their suffering became less; gradually they recovered themselves until at last, after more than an hour had elapsed since the attack, they were enabled to see each other and to talk in broken sentences about the terrible occurrence.

But Codman had escaped.

He had gone, and taken the patrol-wagon and the horses with him.

Nobody had seen him go; there had been nobody in the street at the time; they could not even determine which direction he had taken.

It was half-past eleven when the patrol-wagon drew up in front of the door of the jail with the prisoners; it was half-past one in the morning before the sergeant and his five men were in any condition to realize what had happened.

But Codman, the poisoner, had gone. He had made good his escape.

Nick Carter's work in capturing him had been for naught.

CHAPTER II.

A DANGEROUS CRIMINAL AT LARGE.

Nick Carter was seated in the library of his own house. Opposite him, at the other side of the table, was the police sergeant from whom Doctor Codman had made his escape in such a dramatic manner; and the sergeant had just finished reciting the history of that incident. It was half-past one o'clock of the day following.

"You haven't told me how Codman managed to rid himself of the handcuffs, sergeant," said the detective. "How was it?"

"You can search me, Mr. Carter. I don't know."

"But you examined the handcuffs, didn't you?"

"Sure thing."

"Did the fellow slip his hands through them, do you think?"

"No; they were unlocked."

"Unlocked? How was that? I snapped them onto him myself. I know that they were secure when I placed them there. Who unlocked them?"

"He must have done it himself, sir."

"But how could he have done that? He was handcuffed to the man on either side of him, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Did any stranger have an opportunity to get near him, sergeant?"

"No; there wasn't anybody near him at all. I can swear to that."

"Then how could he have done it?"

"I don't know, unless he had a key in one of his pockets."

"But even if he had such a key, how could he make use of it, handcuffed as he was?"

"I give it up, Mr. Carter. Hanged if I know, if you'll excuse me for speaking rather forcibly."

"I think you are excusable under the circumstances."

"Have you questioned the other prisoners?"

"Yes."

"What do they have to say about it?"

"Not a word. If they know anything about it, they won't tell."

"What do they have to say about the doctor? Aren't they mad about being deserted in such a manner?"

"You should hear them curse him, that's all!"

"And yet they pretend that they do not know how he rid himself of the handcuffs?"

"Yes."

"Then they lie about it, that's all there is about that. The doctor could not have accomplished the feat without assistance from at least one of them, and that assistance must have been rendered while they were inside the patrol-wagon on their way to the jail."

"Well, I can't get anything out of them."

"Who was the officer who was inside the wagon with them?"

"Tomlison."

"Is he entirely trustworthy?"

"You bet your life he is!"

"He isn't a man who would accept a bribe, eh?"

"No, sirree!"

"And the officer on the step outside. What of him?"

"I'll answer for every one of my men, Mr. Carter."

"Well, I don't know as it makes much difference how he escaped; the point is that he did escape, and is now at large."

"That's it."

"And we have got to get him back again somehow."

"I'd like to get my fingers onto him just once!" said the sergeant angrily.

The detective laughed aloud.

"Do you know what would happen, sergeant, if you should get your fingers onto him just once, as you express it?"

"Yes; I'd choke the life out of the scoundrel."

"On the contrary, sergeant, he would throw you over his head as easily as if you were a two-year-old child. I have tackled a good many powerful men in my time, but he is without exception the strongest man I was ever up against."

"Is that true, Mr. Carter?"

"Perfectly true."

"Is he as strong as you are?"

"Yes; every bit. I am not sure that he is not even stronger than I am."

"Great Scott!"

"He is a very dangerous man, sergeant."

"I should say so."

"Tell me again just how he did that act of throwing something into your eyes," said the detective.

"I don't believe that I can make it any plainer than I have already, Mr. Carter. It all happened so quickly that there wasn't time to tell just how it was done. All I know is that, just as I was about to put the usual questions, he stepped back all at once and wheeled round and round just as if he was on a pivot. At the same time he raised his hand aloft, and there was something in it that looked like a big rubber ball. I was reaching under my desk for my revolver when I was struck down just the same as if I had received a blow in the face, and such agony as I experienced then I never endured before, and I hope I'll never have to do it again."

"Blinded you, eh?"

"Blinded, and choked, and burned. It was awful."

"You don't know what happened after that?"

"I don't know a thing after that. Neither do any of the others. Talk about torture! It wasn't until that milkman came and swabbed our eyes with milk, and gave us some to drink, that I could even think."

"Were the other prisoners as bad off as you officers?"

"Every bit. Yes."

"And there won't one of them say a word about the escape?"

"They claim that they know nothing about it—and I think they tell the truth."

"What do they say about the doctor himself?"

"Every one of them swears that he will kill the doctor on sight."

"Humph! What do they say about their association with him?"

"They claim that they never saw him in their lives until three days before the expedition to the cemetery."

"Do you believe that, also?"

"I don't know whether I do, or not. They tell a pretty straight story."

"What is the story?"

"That Codman hunted them up where they hang out—they wouldn't tell me where that is—and offered them fifty dollars each if they would go with him to the cemetery, at the same time explaining that he had dreamed that the young lady had been buried alive, and that it had affected him so that he wanted to make sure about it. He told them that if she should happen to be alive, they would be instrumental in saving her life, and that if she were indeed dead, they would leave her there, and there would be no harm done. He gave each of them twenty-

five in advance, and they each had the twenty-five, which seems to bear out the story; don't you think so?"

"It would seem so, yes."

"They are all crooks, though. One can see that with half an eye."

"Oh, I have no doubt of that. I'll tell you what you had better do, sergeant."

"Well, sir?"

"When you leave here, go down to headquarters and take a look through the picture-gallery. See if you can find any of them there. If you do so, let me know."

"I'll do that. But you'll have a chance to do it yourself. They are in the city now."

"True. That is so. I had forgotten it."

"Officers came from your headquarters after them early this morning."

"Quite right. I'll see the inspector about it, sergeant. It looks to me as if the matter was out of your hands now."

"All except my responsibility for the escape, sir."

"I don't think you need let that worry you. I don't think anything will be done about it. You could hardly have been on your guard against such a hellish method of escape as he employed. The mistake was more mine than yours. I should have gone through his pockets before I turned him over to your men, for I had been warned that he would fight with poisons if he got half a chance. I'll stand by you, sergeant, if I can."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter."

"It will be a warning to you, sergeant, never to be off your guard when you are dealing with unknown criminals."

"You bet it will."

"You found the patrol-wagon, you say?"

"Yes; three miles out of town, on the road toward New York."

"And the horses?"

"I received word just before I came away that they are in charge of the police of the East 126th Street station. They were found wandering in Third Avenue early this morning. They had their bridles on. The rest of the harness we found with the wagon."

"So Codman must have ridden into the city bareback, eh?"

"It looks like it."

"I wonder if he had the gall to go to his office?" murmured Nick musingly.

"What's that, sir?" asked the sergeant.

"I was wondering if Doctor Codman would have dared to go to his office," replied the detective.

"Maybe he's got a telephone. Why don't you call him up and find out?"

The detective laughed aloud. Then he said:

"That isn't at all a bad idea of yours, sergeant. I think I'll try it."

"Maybe he'll answer it himself," said the sergeant, with a grin.

"It would be just like him to do so if he is there," said the detective. "But even if he has been there, I hardly think that he would be there now. He wouldn't consider it safe to hang around his office too long a time, although he might dare to go there as soon as he arrived in the city."

"Try it, anyhow, Mr. Carter, and see. Do it while I am here, won't you?"

"Yes. Shove that receiver over here to me."

The detective glanced through the directory and found the requisite number. Then he took the receiver from the hook and asked for it.

There was a considerable wait after that, but at last the detective heard a faint reply from the other end of the wire.

"Hello!" he called. "Is that the office of Doctor Codman?"

"Yes," came the instant reply.

"Is the doctor in?" asked Nick, in his most dulcet tones.

"Yes," was the astounding response. "Who is it who wishes to speak to him?"

"Tell him that one of his patients wishes to speak to him at once, please."

"Very good, sir. What name?"

"Oh, never mind the name," said Nick. "Ask him to come to the phone."

"You will have to give your name, sir," came the reply again.

"All right. Tell him Mr. Hamilton."

"Very good, sir. Hold the wire."

There was another short wait after that, and then a voice, which was unmistakably the doctor's, shouted over the wire:

"Hello, there! What do you want?"

CHAPTER III.

AN ASTOUNDING INCIDENT.

For an interval—so short that the hesitation was not noticeable—the detective was too greatly surprised to reply. Then he said:

"Am I speaking to Doctor Codman?"

Nick could hear the man at the opposite end of the wire chuckle; and then the reply came plainly:

"Yes, this is Doctor Codman; and unless I am greatly mistaken, you are Nick Carter; eh?"

"Quite right," replied Nick, for the humor of the situation appealed to him instantly, and he was also resolved to make the most of this opportunity. "How are you this morning, doctor?"

"Fine; never better. I swallowed a little bit of that

paralyzer of mine, up there at that country jail; but I have gotten rid of it. What do you think of it, Carter?"

"It certainly did the business," replied Nick.

"It sure did. Why did you call me up?"

"Just to find out if you had been there; that is all."

"You didn't expect to find out that I was here now, did you?"

"No; I will confess that I did not."

"Well, you see I had to come here for a little while, and I thought this morning would be as good a time as any."

"Without doubt."

"Is that all you wanted, Carter?"

"No; not quite," said Nick, laughing.

"What else? It seems to amuse you whatever it is."

"I would like to make an appointment with you for some time later in the day."

"Oh! would you, indeed? Where?"

"How would police headquarters do, doctor?"

"It wouldn't suit me at all, Carter—just now. You would be inclined to make altogether too much of me if I should go there."

"I am afraid that we would."

"But I haven't any objections to meeting you, if you would really like to chat with me."

"Do you mean that, doctor?"

"I certainly do, Carter."

"You will meet me sometime this afternoon?"

"Yes—under conditions."

"What are the conditions?"

"That you give me your word of honor that you will go to the place alone; that you will not attempt to capture me or to harm me in any way, and that when we part you will give me three hours afterward before you tell of the meeting, or attempt to have me followed. One thing more, too."

"What is that?"

"From this moment you are not to mention to anybody that you know anything at all about me, and you are not to make any effort leading to my ultimate capture, such as an attempt to shadow, and all that, until three hours after our meeting. For myself, I will agree to the same conditions. What do you say?"

"You seem to wish to see me even more than I desire to see you," replied Nick.

"Frankly, I do."

"You have not stipulated that I should go to the place of meeting unarmed."

"No; I have disarmed you by your promise—when you have made it."

"You would accept my word for it, then?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, I agree."

"You will not communicate with anybody, at headquarters or elsewhere, in the meantime?"

"No."

"You will go to the place of meeting alone?"

"Yes."

"You will make no attempt to capture or to injure me in any way?"

"No."

"You will give me the three hours after the meeting?"

"Yes."

"And you will not direct any person to go to that place of meeting or near to it, to observe the meeting, or to attempt to follow me when I leave there?"

"No. I will play fair."

"Are you alone now, where you are talking?"

"No."

"Who is with you?"

"The sergeant who was about to question you last night, when you threw dust in his eyes."

"Indeed! Then he has heard one side of this conversation."

"Yes."

"Do you think he has understood it?"

"He would be worse than a fool if he did not."

"Will you answer for him?"

"Yes."

"On your word of honor?"

"Yes."

"Then it's a go."

"Wait a minute," said Nick. "There is one thing that I want you to understand."

"What is it?"

"I am absolved from all of these promises if you make any overt act against me."

"Sure. That's all right. I promise you everything that you have promised me, and there is one thing, Carter, that I want you to understand."

"What is that?"

"I always keep my word."

"Really?"

"I always keep my word. I am a criminal from choice, but all the same I keep my word. If I make you a promise, I keep it. I rather like you, Carter. I wish you were my friend instead of my enemy."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for that."

"Oh, you needn't take the trouble. You are the strongest man I was ever pitted against."

"I might return that compliment."

"But I am even stronger than you are."

"Possibly. What about that place of meeting? Where shall it be?"

"You have an automobile, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Call for me here, at this house, at seven-thirty this evening."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly."

"Well, look here, I will do that all right; but you must understand that you run a risk in meeting me there."

"I understand that, all right."

"If your house should be watched, as it probably will be—in fact, I don't know why it is not under surveillance now—and if you should be taken you must understand that it will be through no fault of mine. I have given you my word and I will keep it."

"I understand that all right, too."

"Don't blame me for anything that might happen."

"I won't."

"Then I am to go for you, at Stoneyhedge Court, where your office is located, at half-past seven o'clock this evening?"

"Precisely."

"I'll be there, doctor."

"Agreed. What is your car? A Peerless, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"When you approach the court, will you take care to do it so that the steering wheel will be next to the curb?"

"Yes."

"And as you stop the machine, will you move over so that I can get in under the wheel?"

"Why is that?"

"Because for the purposes of perfect safety I wish to run the car for the first half-hour."

"I don't know about agreeing to that, doctor."

"It must be that, or nothing. Will you do it? I won't wreck the machine, or hurt it or you; and if I am operating the car you will have a decided advantage over me in case I should have any inclination to break my word not to harm you—which, I assure you again, will not be the case. But I know that you do not trust me as I trust you."

"Very well. I will do all that you ask."

"Then it is all agreed?"

"Yes."

"Good-by till half after seven."

"Good-by."

The detective returned the receiver to the hook after this most extraordinary conversation, and turned again to the sergeant.

"Well, sergeant," he asked, "what do you think of it?"

"I will confess, Mr. Carter, that I do not understand it at all."

"It is simply that Doctor Codman and I have declared a truce which is to endure until three hours after I have parted from him at the meeting which is to take place between us to-night."

"I wouldn't go to that meeting under the conditions you have made with him, if you were to offer me ten thousand dollars to do it, Mr. Carter; and if you will pardon plain speaking I think you are a fool to do it yourself."

"Possibly. That is a reply to the first part of your statement. To the second I have only to say that I do not agree with you."

"Why not? What can you accomplish by meeting him?"

"Possibly nothing. Perhaps a great deal."

"But what?"

"Sergeant, all criminals of the educated sort are egoists. It is the rock upon which they always founder in the end."

"What of that?"

"Codman has arranged this meeting for to-night in order to pit his wits against mine. I am glad to meet him under those circumstances, and to let him go again, for several reasons, of which the chief one is that it will give me an opportunity to study him; and that is an opportunity I have never enjoyed. He is almost unknown to me. He is a brilliant man, mentally. But all the same he is an egoist. Not an egotist, mind you; there is a difference."

"I don't understand you at all, Mr. Carter."

"Listen. We are to ride together in my car. Where, I do not know, and I care less. But I will have an opportunity to talk with this great criminal, and before we part I will know a great deal more about him than he thinks, or than I could learn in another month, under ordinary conditions. In a word, I believe that the three hours' liberty I give him after we will part will shorten the time to his capture by days, if not by weeks."

"I only hope that it will."

"And now, sergeant, you must give me your word of honor that you will not mention a word about this to a living soul."

"I certainly will not, sir," declared the sergeant.

CHAPTER IV.

WHERE THE SERGEANT GOT LEFT.

For a moment after this surprising response to his request, the detective sat perfectly still, regarding the sergeant with a smile that had in it a certain element of suggestiveness which would have rendered the policeman uneasy had he known Nick Carter better.

"Did I understand you correctly, sergeant?" he asked calmly.

"Perfectly, Mr. Carter."

"You will not keep silent about this affair until I give you liberty of speech?"

"No, sir, I won't. I consider it my duty as an——"

"Never mind what you consider to be your duty. The point is that you refuse my request."

"Flat. Yes, sir."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well," he said, "I don't suppose I can coerce you."

"No, sir, you can't."

"Very well, we will drop the subject. Of course I cannot be held responsible for what *you* choose to say or do, sergeant."

"I'm glad that you see it in that light, Mr. Carter."

The sergeant was rapidly assuming that attitude which Devery has fitly described as "chesty," and Nick smiled rather broadly at him again.

"Thank you," he said. "By the way, sergeant, won't you have a fresh cigar?"

"Thank you, yes."

"Help yourself, sergeant; and after you have lighted it, if you care to see my house, I will take pleasure in showing you through it. It is a privilege which I accord to very few."

"I shall be honored and delighted, Mr. Carter."

"Come ahead, then. I think we will begin at the top of the house and work down. In that manner we will have finished when we arrive again at the parlor floor. Will that suit you?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

"Come along," said Nick; and he led the way to the top of the house.

Now, all who are familiar with the Nick Carter histories, will recall the fact that on the top floor of the house, in about the middle of the building, there is a small, padded room, windowless, and doorless, too, save for the single one of heavy oak, which is also padded on the inside, and which communicates with the hall.

It is lighted from the top by a skylight, and that in turn is protected by a heavy iron grating.

There were often occasions which Nick found it necessary to bring desperate characters to his own home and to keep them there for awhile, and it was for that reason that he had had this padded room constructed.

No sound from it could be heard ten feet away from that door, and a person once fastened inside had no hope of escaping from it until Nick chose to set him at liberty.

When they reached the top floor together, Nick opened the door to the padded room, and then, stepping back a pace, he said quite politely:

"Step inside, sergeant, if you please."

Suspecting nothing, the sergeant did as directed, and instantly he heard the door close behind him, for Nick had closed it and locked it, and then calmly walked away.

He did not even wait to hear the sergeant's shouts and threats, but went deliberately down the stairs to his particular den, where he seated himself, and having selected a book, began to read.

Presently Chick came in, and the detective laid aside the book.

"Have you heard the latest news, Chick?" he asked.

"Yes; if you refer to the escape of Codman."

"Sure. What else?"

"Are you going to take up the case again? Are you going after him?"

"I certainly am, Chick—to-morrow morning."

"Want me?"

"I think so. I'll tell you—to-morrow morning."

"Don't you think it would be a good idea if I should run up to Stoneyhedge Court and take a little look around, Nick?"

"Yes—to-morrow morning."

Chick suddenly began to sit up and take notice.

"What is all this about to-morrow morning?" he asked.

"It is that I don't want anything at all done in the Codman matter before to-morrow morning."

"May I ask why?"

"You may—to-morrow morning."

Nick, you certainly do know how to be most confoundedly aggravating when you take the notion."

"I suppose so; most people do. But, all the same, Chick, if you should happen to meet Doctor Codman on the street this afternoon or evening, I want you to pass him by without a word. Is that sufficiently plain?"

"Quite so."

"And to-morrow morning I want you to take off your coat and hat, metaphorically, and go for him for all you're worth. Have you got that down, too?"

"Yes."

"Until then, he is to be as free as air."

"All right."

"And now, Chick, I have got another thing to say to you."

"All right."

"You are to forget what I say now—until to-morrow morning. You are to remember it then. Can you do that?"

"Yes."

"I have an appointment to meet Codman this evening. I have talked with him over the telephone this afternoon. It is a part of my agreement with him that I was to tell nobody about the matter until three hours after that meeting; but I am telling you now for then. You are to make no use of the knowledge whatever before to-morrow morning. Have I your promise?"

"Yes."

"We have declared a sort of truce."

"How did it happen?"

"I called up his office without the least idea that he would be there, but he answered the call."

"The devil he did!"

"Fact. We had quite a chat, and the upshot of it was that we are to meet to-night. I am going after him with the Peerless. We are to ride together—I don't know where."

"What is the reason for the meeting?"

"My reason is that I wish to study the man. I think

he will say or do something to give himself away somehow. I don't know what his reason is."

"I can tell you what it is, Nick."

"Oh, I know what you are going to say, but I don't agree with you."

"He is going to play some devil's trick on you, depend upon it."

"I hardly think so, Chick; but even if I knew positively that he intended to make such an attempt it would not deter me from going."

"I know that. Don't you think I don't!"

"I shall be on my guard."

"You are not going to this meeting unarmed?"

"Certainly not."

"I don't like it at all, Nick. It looks mighty fishy to me."

"Oh, well, I'm going to take the chance."

"Who proposed this? You, or he?"

"I really think that I did it."

"He has got something up his sleeve for you, Nick."

"It is possible. It is even probable. However ——" The detective paused and shrugged his shoulders expressively; then he added:

"By the way, we have a guest up-stairs—in the padded room."

"Who is it?"

"The sergeant from whom Codman escaped last night. He was present when I did the telephoning. I asked him to give me his word that he wouldn't mention the incident until I gave him permission to do so. He refused, and—well, I locked him up. And that reminds me, you had better telephone out to his station-house that I am detaining him here on a matter of business till to-morrow morning. Will you attend to it?"

"Yes."

"Now, Chick, I have told you about this affair in order that you may guess what has become of me if I shouldn't happen to show up before morning."

"I think you wouldn't go on this fool's errand, Nick."

"Of course I shall go, Chick."

"Then I wish you would take me with you."

"That is impossible."

"Then let me mosey along to the place of meeting and see what happens."

"No; that would be to go against the agreement."

"Do you suppose for a moment that *he* will respect any agreement he has made with you?"

"To tell you the truth, Chick, I rather think he will."

"Well, I don't."

"A mere difference of opinion."

"Can't I tag along behind somehow?"

"No; I forbid it."

"Suppose I should go against your orders for once in my life."

"It would be the first, and also the last time, Chick," replied the detective seriously.

"You know very well that I won't do such a thing."

"Of course I know it."

Chick was silent for a considerable time. Then he said:

"What do you suppose is his reason for wishing to meet you, Nick?"

"I don't know; only I suspect that it has something to do with the man's conceit. He is like Quartz—an egoist. He wants to talk with me. He wants to show me how smart he is. He is anxious that I should understand what a superior fellow he is. He wants to show himself off to me; and unless I very much mistake the man, he wishes to defy me."

"It is *my* opinion that he wishes to murder you."

"Tut, tut, Chick. Don't be so melodramatic."

"I think it just the same."

"I won't give him a chance, Chick."

"No; not with ordinary weapons. But he doesn't fight with the same sort of weapons that other men use. He fights with poisons."

"Granted. But I am, therefore, on my guard."

"Would you have been on your guard if you had been in that station-house last night when he made his escape?"

"Possibly not."

"Depend upon it, he has in mind some performance of that sort against you to-night."

"It is possible, as I have said; but I do not think so."

"Where are you to meet?"

"I think I will not tell you that."

"Why? Do you think that I will go against your orders in the matter?"

"No; but the temptation would be great."

"Isn't there some way of getting around this affair, Nick, so that I can be at least within call in case of necessity for it?"

"No, Chick, there is not. Things will have to stand as they are."

"All right," said Chick. "Oh, all right."

CHAPTER V.

A RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT.

At exactly half-past seven to the minute that night, Nick Carter's big Peerless car drew up rapidly in front of the main entrance to Stoneyhedge Court and came to a stop.

At the same instant, as if by a preconcerted signal, two men, one of whom was a burly negro, came rapidly from the entrance to the building and approached the motor-car almost on a run.

Each of the men carried a bundle—huge bundles they

wrapped in burlap—and these they threw into the tonneau of the car.

Then they parted.

Neither of them uttered a word, but the negro turned and hurried away up the street toward the avenue, while the other strode swiftly around to the side of the machine, threw himself into the chauffeur's seat, seized the wheel, threw on the power, and the automobile started ahead with a leap.

Inside of two minutes they were in Broadway and had turned northward, traveling so rapidly that Nick said quietly to the silent man who sat beside him and who was handling the car:

"I am afraid, doctor, that if you go at this rate, some of the bicycle cops along here will hold you up. Good lord, man! you haven't even disguised yourself."

"No." The doctor had pushed his cap back and had turned his satanic-like countenance toward the detective. "I didn't think it necessary."

"Why? Haven't the officers been to your rooms today?"

"Not one. It never occurred to them to look there for me. You were the only one who had the sense to think of it, and even you used the telephone. You did not really suppose I had gone there, did you?"

"N-no."

"Well, Carter, I have been there all day. I went directly there after I rendered the cop, and I haven't left the house since."

"You certainly have the courage of your convictions, doctor."

"Yes; I usually have."

"Where are we bound for now, doctor? You are running the machine, you know."

"Yes, I know; and I am intensely obliged to you. You have no idea of the service you are rendering me."

"I suppose not. Where are we bound?"

"Do you mind if I do not reply to that question just yet? I will if you insist, but I would prefer to defer it."

"As you please. What have you got in those bundles?"

"Merely some of my effects which I did not care to leave behind me."

"I see. I suppose it is on account of them that you arrange [illegible] me, eh?"

"Partly that—yes."

"This is rather a paradoxical position for me to be in, doctor."

"I suppose it is." He turned his face again toward the steering-wheel, and there was a grim smile upon it.

"You are a brave man, Carter," he said.

"Ha! ha!"

"You consent to put yourself so completely in my power."

"Have I any choice in your power or you see to think?"

"You are."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, for instance, by one turn of this steering-wheel, I could wreck the car, and kill you. You will admit that, won't you?"

"Yes. But then you would meet with the same fate."

"But I have much less to live for than you; you have everything. And then again, knowing what I was about to do, I would be prepared for it and might save myself."

"It all sounds to me like a very unnecessary argument," said Nick.

"Then again," continued the doctor, "I might, with my disengaged hand, prick you with a pin that is even now reposing in the lapel of my coat. If I should do that, you would drop dead before we had traveled another rod."

"Was it to tell me these interesting things about what you might do that you brought about this meeting?"

"No; but as I said before, you are a brave man to risk so much for a man you hate."

"Hate? I don't hate you, doctor. My feelings toward you are not so exalted as that."

"Despise, then."

"That is nearer the mark; although I do not think that is the correct word, either."

"You certainly have no love for me."

"That is quite true, doctor."

"If you weren't bound by a promise, you would seek to capture me now, and take me to prison."

"That is also quite true."

"Why, Carter? What have I done to you?"

"To me, personally—nothing."

"Then why——"

"You are on one side of society; I am on the other. The two sides are at war with each other. That is all."

"Are you in love with Miss Nancy Graeme?"

"I have never thought of such a thing."

"Has her family any particular interest for you?"

"None whatever."

"Then how have I offended you?"

"You haven't offended me. You interest me. You are a criminal, and a clever one. My profession is to catch criminals. Sooner or later I will catch you, doctor."

"Ha! Do you think so, indeed?"

"No; I know it."

"Possibly you are overconfident."

"I do not think so."

"Can we not establish a lasting truce between us?"

"Impossible, doctor. Did you bring me out here to ask that question?"

"Partly; but there are others."

"Let us hear them."

"Would you like to make a million dollars, Carter?"

"[illegible] particularly. I have two or three more already."

"Indeed! I was not aware of that."

"What is the next question?"

"Did you believe that I would keep the promise I made to you over the telephone? Answer truthfully."

"Yes, I did."

"Why did you believe it? You do not regard me as a man of honor, do you?"

"No; I can't say that I do."

"Then why did you believe me?"

"That is rather a metaphysical question. I don't think that I could answer it."

"This is a fine machine you have here, Carter."

"Yes; and that reminds me. Where are you taking me?"

They were crossing the bridge into Westchester County when the detective asked the question, and for a moment the doctor did not reply. But, after a pause, he said:

"I have a laboratory up here a few miles farther. It is hidden away in the depths of a forest where it would be impossible to find it unless you knew the road. I am taking you there, Carter."

"Why?"

"In order that we may talk undisturbed. You will be at liberty to leave there at any time you please, of course."

"Certainly; I understand that."

"I have some things there which I wish to show to you. I think you will be interested."

"Will you tell me why you wish to show them to me?"

"No; not until after I have made the exhibit. After that, I will tell you."

"You are pleased to be mysterious, doctor."

"Not at all; but I do not wish to spoil a climax by betraying it beforehand."

"Quite so. How much farther is it?"

"Five miles. We leave the main road just above here."

"Don't puncture my tires, doctor."

"There is no danger."

They rode on in silence after that for a considerable distance, which was broken at last by the doctor.

"There is really no very serious charge against me, is there, Carter?" he asked.

"Attempted murder. That is all."

"But you couldn't prove even that."

"Well, I'm not so sure about that. Doctor Stag is a very wise old chap. He has some of your medicines at his home. He has been working over them for a considerable time."

"Ah! He couldn't analyze them in a thousand years."

"Possibly not."

"Neither he nor any one else. They defy analysis, Carter. All my poisons do that."

Nick smiled at the trees beside the road.

"Now," he thought, "we are getting at it. We have struck upon his hobby. I may expect him to be an interesting study from now on."

Aloud, he said:

"You are a wonderful toxicologist, doctor."

The doctor did not at once respond to this remark; instead he seemed to be turning it over in his mind like a tender morsel. At last he said:

"Don't think me a brag. I do not mean it so; but it is the truth that there is not another man in all the world who possesses a tenth part of the knowledge of poisons and how to create them, that I do—and it is an accident that I have attained to the knowledge I possess."

"How is that?"

"I need not tell you that. Suffice it to say that I have traveled extensively in the Far East; I have studied in Venice, in Rome, in India. I have unearthed secrets which have been hidden away from human knowledge for centuries. I know the secrets of the ancient Egyptians, of the Phœnecians. I have read manuscripts which no human eyes but mine have seen in thousands of years. I have penetrated to the palace of the Grand Lama of Tibet, and I have lived there an honored guest. There is no disease known to man which I cannot cure; nor is there a disease known to man which I cannot induce."

"It is a terrible knowledge to possess, doctor."

"It is a splendid knowledge to possess, Carter."

"With it all you should be the greatest man of your time."

"With it all I *am* the greatest man of my time."

"And yet you permit yourself to descend to the commission of paltry crimes. Why?"

"I need money to continue my travels and my studies."

"Why not seek it in a legitimate manner?"

"It is much too slow a method."

"Why take human life in your researches?"

"Human life is no more to me than the snap of my fingers. A man's life or a woman's life is merely an incident; nothing more."

"To what do you hope to attain by further studies?"

"Who knows? To the secret of life, perhaps. Nobody has ever discovered that. But I have it—almost! *almost!*"

They turned from the main road into a narrow way through a forest, and the doctor said:

"We are nearly there now, Carter; nearly there."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST EXPERIENCE.

During the last half-hour of their ride and particularly since the subject of the doctor's science had been mentioned, Nick Carter had decided finally in his own mind that he was in the company of a maniac.

A monomaniac, to be sure, but none the less an in-

one person whenever the subject of his malady should be mentioned.

Many men have gone mad in the pursuit of further knowledge. Parnassus is the first of whom we have official record, when he chained Promethius to the rock and tortured him with fire in order that he might depict with his brush and pigments upon the canvas the awful realization of human agony.

There have been others counted by thousands since that time; and now here was one, riding calmly beside the detective.

It was evident to Nick that Codman had spoken truly when he described his extensive travels and his studies; and it was also evident that the superabundance of scientific knowledge he had attained relative to poisons and their manufacture had driven him mad on that one subject.

That last remark of his, before they turned into the forest road, was sufficient proof of it, for who has dared to make the effort to discover the secret of his life unless he has been first made mad?

"And yet," thought the detective, "on all other subjects he is sane enough."

The road through the forest was rough and uneven, and they were obliged to move very slowly in order to do no injury to the spring or the tires of the motor car.

In places there was barely room between the trees for them to pass, and the road—if it might be called a road—turned and twisted and constantly ascended until at last the doctor brought the machine to a stop on a ledge of rock which overlooked a deep gulf in the hills—a deep ravine, the bottom of which was completely hidden by the foliage of trees, the tops of which were many feet below them.

"We will leave the automobile here," said the physician. "It will be an easy matter for you to turn it around and follow the back track when you are ready to return. Will you do me the kindness to carry one of the bundles, Carter?"

"But where in blazes are you going?" demanded the detective.

"Down there," was the reply, and he pointed toward the bottom of the ravine.

"But, why, what for?"

"My laboratory is there."

"But I care nothing for your laboratory. It has no interest for me. I think I have gone quite far enough," said the detective quietly.

It was an uncanny spot where they were standing.

The headlight of the automobile had of course guided them through the woods, and here the forest was somewhat open, so that the full moon could send its beams down upon them.

In order to [illegible] physician, put down one bundle.

"Come," he said, laughing. "Don't be foolish. I tell you that I will show you something which no human eye save mine has ever seen; and, besides, we have not had our conference as yet. Come."

The detective hesitated.

He had never in his life known what fear was, but just at the present moment his better judgment warned him that he ought not place himself further in the power of this man.

Nick had no means of knowing what might await him at the bottom of that deep ravine. It was within possibility that there might be confederates of the doctor there, who would leap out upon the detective without warning, overpower him, and thus hold him a prisoner, notwithstanding the promises that had been made.

And for what fate would he be held, once he were captured?

This crazy man who was studying the "secret of life" might be plotting to make Nick Carter a victim of his scientific pursuits.

In that moment Nick remembered the infamous Doctor Quartz and his scientific studies. He remembered the vivisectionists of Lake Simcoe, in Ontario—and he hesitated.

"Come," said the doctor again; and he took one of the bundles from the tonneau, threw it across his shoulder, and turned away without another word through a path which the moonlight plainly revealed to them; for while he had been talking with the detective, he had taken occasion to shut off the headlight of the automobile.

Nick watched him go, without moving from his tracks.

He listened intently, and he could hear the doctor as he scrambled down the pathway, which evidently became quite steep before it descended far.

And then, when he was quite sure that the doctor had gone on without so much as turning to discover if he were followed, Nick suddenly decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

Leaving the second bundle where it was, in the tonneau, Nick turned aside and disappeared among the trees; not along the pathway which Codman had followed, but at an acute angle from it, and presently having discovered a dense growth of laurel, he concealed himself in the midst of it—and waited.

An hour passed without so much as a sound coming to the detective's ears, save the regular night noises of the forest.

Nick was on the point of changing his position; he was just about to make his way slowly down the path when he heard the sound of stealthy footsteps approaching up that steep incline, and a moment later the moon shone full upon the upturned face of Doctor Codman as he crept nearer to the detective on his hands and knees.

It was evident that since Nick first heard him, he had changed [illegible] position in order to approach the detective more silently.

The detective no longer entertained any doubt that there was an ulterior motive in bringing him to this place, but he was still in doubt as to what that motive might be.

He waited, therefore, silently watching what the doctor might do.

At the end of the pathway, where it looked out upon a little clearing around the ledge where the automobile stood, Codman paused and silently regarded the machine.

At last, as if satisfied that the detective was not there, he rose to his feet and approached the machine, and Nick could hear him muttering to himself.

"Where the devil did he go?" the detective heard him say at last. "I wonder if he has flunked—got scared? No; that isn't like Nick Carter, from all that I have heard of him. More than likely he has followed me down the path, and then when he saw me returning, he has stepped to one side until I passed. If he has——"

The mere idea of such a thing seemed to spur the doctor to hasty action, for he sprang forward, seized the remaining bundle from the tonneau, and, turning quickly, he disappeared for the second time down the pathway.

For an instant more the detective hesitated again.

The question in his mind was whether he should follow the doctor, or leap into the Peerless car and hasten away to return again after the three hours of truce should end.

This latter idea was plainly what he should have done. It was logically the only proper course for him to pursue under the circumstances; but yet there was an element about such a course which was intensely displeasing to the detective.

On the face of it, it looked like an exhibition of cowardice; it looked—to himself—as if he were afraid to proceed with the adventure to the end.

Nick listens to no critic whose judgments are so harsh and uncompromising as himself; and the detective's estimation of himself at that moment was that if he should escape from the spot, as he thought of doing, it would be because he was afraid to proceed.

He knew, of course, that it was not so; and yet——

He stepped quickly to the machine, withdrew the spark plug, and dropped it into one of his pockets; then, moving quickly, he began a rapid but silent descent of the pathway.

As he proceeded, he paused from time to time to listen; and when he thought he was near the bottom he stopped and waited a long time, listening.

No sound came to him, however, and after awhile he continued on again.

The bottom of the ravine was reached at last, and as he stepped out upon the almost level floor of rock with which nature had paved the place he saw directly in front of him a rather commodious cabin built of huge logs, from which, through an open door and a window beside it, a light was gleaming.

The detective crept forward silently, taking care to keep in the shadow of the cliff so that if the doctor should happen to come to the door to look outside he would not be seen.

He nearly uttered an exclamation of surprise when he had secured a position from which he could obtain a view of the interior of the cabin.

Codman was bending over a rude table which stood in the center of the single room of the cabin, and stretched upon that table at full-length was an object which appeared to be the naked body of a man of almost mammoth proportions.

From the waist down the body was concealed by a sheet, which had been thrown carelessly over it; but it was the attitude of the physician which astonished the detective, and made him wonder what in the world Codman was doing.

The man seemed entirely to have forgotten the proximity of the detective—or he was careless concerning it; Nick could not determine which.

Just now he was bending over the silent form upon the table, with his own face within a few inches of that of the supposed corpse, as if he were engaged in a profound study of the dead features.

More than that, at stated intervals, and with the regularity of clockwork, Codman seized upon first one arm and then the other of the form upon the table, and after raising it slowly to a certain height, dropped it again to its place beside the body.

He seemed to be counting time while he performed this strange ceremony.

It was as if he were saying to himself:

"One, two, three—raise the right arm; four, five, six—replace it. One, two, three—raise the left arm; four, five, six—replace it. One, two, three," etc., over and over again with a regularity and precision that was maddening to one who looked silently on at the scene, as the detective was doing.

And that gigantic form upon the improvised table! What was it? What could it have been?

The dead body of a man? The murdered body of a victim of the doctor's pursuit of science? Could it be that?

It seemed incredible to the detective; and again he took his eyes from the strange antics of the physician and studied the silent form upon the table.

"If that is the dead body of a man," he mused, "he was a giant when he lived. If I am any judge of proportions, that chap would be eight feet tall if he were standing upright."

And, indeed, it was true.

"I wonder," thought the detective, "if that is what he wished to show me? I wonder if I am needlessly

alarmed? I wonder if, after all, I have to do with a madman who is practically harmless?"

He was silent again for a time, watching the doctor, who never once desisted in his clockwork regularity of moving the arms of the body in front of him up and down, and gazing intently into the waxen face the while; then he added:

"At all events, he seems to be alone. There are no confederates here. I have only to fear the subtle poisons which the doctor uses, and I can guard against them by keeping far enough away from him. I am as quick, or quicker, than he is, and I have my little revolvers in my sleeves. I think it is up to me to see this thing through to the end; and plainly it is my duty to know more concerning that remarkable body on the table. Here goes!"

Without further hesitation he stepped briskly forward, ascended the two steps to the doorway, and stepped inside the cabin.

Nick thought at first that the doctor did not hear him; but in that he was mistaken, for after a moment, without turning his head, or pausing for an instant in the regularity of his occupation, he said:

"Ah, Carter; here at last? Help yourself to a seat. I'll talk with you presently. Take that Morris chair in the corner. It's the only decent one I have in this place."

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERY OF THE SECRET OF LIFE.

The detective seated himself as he was directed to do, and coolly lighted a cigar; then he leaned back comfortably in the chair while he watched the doctor narrowly.

Presently, in a tone which suggested that the idea had just occurred to him, he said:

"Codman, would you mind telling me what the devil you are doing?"

Without turning his head, the doctor replied:

"I am working over my model—as you see."

"Ah; it is a model, then?"

"Certainly; what did you suppose it was?"

"From outside the door it appeared surprisingly like a dead body; like the corpse of a man."

"It will be a living body before I am through with it."

"*What!*" exclaimed Nick, surprised in spite of himself into an exclamation.

"It will be a living body before I am through with it."

"Indeed! You surprise me! Is that what you meant when you referred to the 'secret of life' while we were in the motor-car?"

"Precisely."

"Then it is not really a corpse? It looks surprisingly like one."

"Did you ever see a man of the size of this fellow, Carter?" was the reply.

"Once; in Barnum's show, several years ago."

"Oh! the big colonel. I remember him. Yes, he was about this fellow's size."

"May I come closer, doctor, and have a look at him?"

"No; remain where you are until I have finished here. After that you may."

"How long do you keep up that sort of thing?"

"It depends entirely upon results, Carter. Sometimes a few moments only; sometimes for hours. It depends—it depends."

He had not once turned his head or looked at the detective, and he was engaged in a most uncanny—and in one respect, at least—repulsive occupation; and yet he spoke as naturally as if they were seated in a parlor and engaged in a discussion of the most ordinary affairs.

"May I inquire what your model is made of?" asked Nick, after another pause.

"No; you may not—at present. Be quiet now, if you please. I told you that I would show you something that no human eye but mine had ever seen. Now you know what I meant."

"Yes."

Again there was silence; this time a long one, while the doctor continued to work steadily over his strange model, and Nick was reminded again of what had occurred to him while he was outside:

"One, two, three; raise the right arm. Four, five, six; replace it. One, two, three; raise the left arm. Four, five, six; replace it."

A half-hour passed in utter silence and Nick was rapidly becoming impatient.

He had turned his head away and was gazing out through the open door into the darkness, when he heard a sharp exclamation from the doctor.

Turning quickly to see what had caused it, he almost leaped from his chair in his astonishment and consternation.

The huge figure on the table was sitting bolt upright in its place; the eyes were open and staring, apparently, straight ahead; the jaws of the monster were working horribly, and there were convulsive and spasmodic movements of the muscles of the chest and arms.

Nick could see the huge biceps swell and relax; he could see the giant chest expand and contract; the muscles of the throat protruded and then receded; the scalp with its shock of tawny hair moved forward and then back again.

The face had not been a repulsive one in repose; now it was horrible in the muscular contortions it underwent.

The detective started to his feet, but the cold voice of the doctor, speaking in a low but intense tone, interrupted him:

"Sit down, Carter," he said. "Don't you dare to move a step in this direction—now."

Nick relapsed into his chair.

"What devil's work is this?" was his thought; but he said nothing aloud.

After a moment, while the detective watched with a fascination he would not have believed possible in himself, the spasmodic contortions of the muscles ceased. The face of the monster became composed and placid once more; then slowly, very slowly, the huge body sank back and into its former attitude until it was once again stretched at full-length along the top of the table.

Codman placed the arms of the giant along the sides of the body; then he drew up the sheet until it was entirely covered, and then, with a smile on his satanic countenance, he turned and faced the detective.

His eyes were shining strangely; his lips were parted, showing his gleaming teeth; his black and pointed beard seemed to stand out as if it were an index indicating the detective.

But otherwise the man appeared to be his natural self, although he seemed to be greatly fatigued by the exertions he had just undergone.

Without making any remark, he crossed the room to another table, helped himself to a cigar, which he lighted, and then threw himself at full-length on his back upon a convenient couch.

"Do me the favor not to speak for a few moments, Carter," he said; and he closed his eyes and instantly appeared to be sleeping.

Nick left his chair and crossed to the door, looking out upon the moonlit scene, for although the cliffs left the house itself in shadow, the light of the moon shone full upon the opposite side of the ravine.

He was startled presently by the voice of Codman, speaking almost into his ear.

"Come, Carter," he said. "I am rested now. It is fearfully hard work, fighting against the thing which we call nature's law. But I am winning. I am winning."

"What is that thing upon the bench?" asked Nick curtly, pointing toward the inanimate object under the sheet.

The doctor smiled, and replied:

"It is the body of a man—a giant, isn't it?"

"Is *it* it?"

"You have seen for yourself; how do you answer the question?"

"I cannot answer it. I confess that I am puzzled."

"Good. Sit down again, Carter. Take that Morris chair again."

"Thank you. But, my question——"

"I have replied to it. It is the body of a man."

"The dead body of a man who was once alive?"

"Surely that; rather is it the living body of a man who was once dead."

"You speak in riddles."

"I speak scientifically, Carter."

"You get beyond me. Tell me what it is."

"Just now it is nothing; less than nothing unless you might call it a masterpiece of my own handiwork."

"Do you mean, Codman, that you *made* that thing?"

Codman bowed his head in token of assent.

"That you *manufactured* it?"

"Yes."

"From what?"

"From chemistry; from my knowledge of science; from knowledge alone. From liquids and solids; from the air. From nothing, if you will."

"Confound it, Codman, let me look at it."

"Not yet. Later. Sit still. We must talk. I am tired now."

"Well?"

"Have you ever read 'Frankenstein'? That horrible story by Mrs. Shelley?"

"Yes."

"You know how her hero manufactured his monster, do you not?"

"Yes."

"He robbed graveyards; he dissected corpses; he resorted to all sorts of means to procure material for his work. I did nothing so crude as that."

"Plainly the man is hopelessly mad," thought the detective. Aloud, he said:

"What did you do?"

"My dear Carter, I *made* the parts I wanted. I created them. Ordinary flesh would spoil it; it would rot; it would become offensive in no time, would it not?"

"I should think so."

"Yonder"—he pointed toward the benchlike table—"is no ordinary flesh to rot and become corrupt. It is only flesh when I will it so; when I animate it with life—as you saw me do just now. When I leave it—when I restore it to the condition in which it now is, there is nothing there to be corrupted; there is nothing there to spoil and become offensive. In an hour from now, if you were alone here, and should remove that sheet, you would be convinced by the evidence of your own senses—by the senses of seeing and of feeling—that I am a great sculptor, and that yonder figure is a carved image, done in marble—and yet, you have already seen it otherwise."

"That is true."

"You have seen it move. You have seen it sit up. You have seen its staring eyes; its moving muscles; its contorting features. You have seen its bosom heave as if with the breath of life. You have seen all this, have you not?"

"Yes."

"And will you refuse the evidence of your own eyes?"

"No; I cannot do that."

"Will you believe that that monster—as you no doubt have christened it—lives?"

"No; I do not believe that it lives. I believe that you somehow animated it."

"Have that as you will. It moved."

"Yes; it moved. But what made it move?"

"I did."

"How? Is there a mechanism inside the body?"

For an instant the doctor scowled at the detective angrily; then he smiled and replied:

"Yes; the same sort of mechanism that is inside your body and mine. Heart, and lungs, and the ordinary and regular functionary parts of a human body."

"Nothing else?"

"No; nothing else."

"Let me see it, doctor. Let me have a nearer view."

For reply, Codman looked at his watch.

"After another five minutes," he said, as if he were working and waiting by a time table.

"Tell me, then, while we wait that five minutes, what you are accomplishing, or what you expect to accomplish by this strange work of yours?" asked Nick.

"I have told you once already."

"A knowledge of what you call the secret of life?"

"Precisely. And I have got it—*almost*."

"When you have discovered it—if you do so—what then?"

"What then, what then, do you ask? Everything then. No more disease. No more death by reason of what is now termed natural causes. Life eternal, if you will have it so; that is, material life eternal. Do you comprehend me now?"

"Hardly. Not quite, I think."

"Come," said the doctor, rising and approaching the bench. "The time of waiting is over."

He drew back the sheet, exposing the huge body to view, which was now as white as the muslin that covered it; and Nick stretched both his hand and touched it.

Instantly he drew his hand away with an exclamation of astonishment.

The body was as cold, as hard, and as white as if it were indeed a marble statue.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MOMENT OF INFINITE PERIL.

Codman had asked the detective, but a moment before, if he could believe the evidence of his own senses, and he had replied that he could; but now, as he rested his hand upon the apparently marble statue, he felt that it was next to impossible to do so.

He knew that he had seen that stone image sitting upright before him. He knew that he had seen it move.

He had seen it lie back gently in its resting-place after the administrations of the uncanny doctor were over.

He had seen those marble muscles move with spasmodic action: he had seen those eyes of stone, open and staring; he had seen those lineless lips open and close again, disclosing strong and even teeth.

He had seen that graven chest rise and fall as if there were breath beneath it, *and he had seen the red glow of life diffuse itself beneath a skin that was as apparent as his own.*

The doctor was smiling at him when he turned.

"What do you think of it now?" he demanded.

"I do not know what to think," admitted the detective.

"Do you think that, for instance, I am the villain, the scoundrel, the criminal you have painted me? Or do you now think that I am a man of science who pursues his studies in spite of all opposition?"

There was a strange light in the doctor's eyes when he asked the question; it was almost a menacing one; and Nick replied quietly:

"Codman, you made yourself a criminal when you sought to murder Nancy Graeme with your subtle poisons. You——"

"I never meant to murder her at all. She would have been none the worse for her experiences. She would have been much better off, in fact. I meant to save her, and to make her my wife."

"That is begging the question," said Nick. "But again you made a criminal of yourself when you abducted her brother, drugged him into a semblance of imbecility, and turned him at large in a great city when he did not know his own name, or who he was at all."

"I meant to restore him ultimately to his reason."

"Yes. When you had stolen his fortune, for you made a criminal of yourself again when you set yourself to steal the fortunes of that boy and girl. If you were ten thousand times the scientist you are, you would still be a criminal."

"Damn your logic, Carter! It has nothing to do with my science."

"It has much to do with mine."

"With your trade, you mean; the trade of a thief-catcher."

"Call it what you will, Codman; but at the same time call yourself the thief."

"By Heaven, Carter——"

"Hush! Our compact reads that we are not to attempt to injure each other. Plain speaking can hurt neither of us."

"Our compact. Yes; to be sure. For the moment I had forgotten that there was one."

He smiled strangely into the detective's eyes as he said this, and Nick could not avoid a feeling of uneasiness in the presence of this strange man.

"Just what was that compact, Carter?" the doctor continued, after a pause. "It was a truce between us, was it not?"

"Yes."

"To continue until three hours after you have left me: until those hours after we part. Those were the terms, were they not?"

"Yes."

"And during the truce we each pledged ourselves to make no effort to injure the other. Is that also your understanding of the matter?"

"Yes."

"Good. You will keep your word to the letter, and I will keep mine. Until three hours after we separate; so said the bond?"

"Yes."

"Good again. Now let us return to pleasanter subjects. Are you in haste to be gone?"

"No; I would prefer now to wait until daylight."

The doctor chuckled and looked at his watch.

"It shall be so, then," he said, "until daylight; and if you will wait still longer, you shall stand beside me while I operate upon the general again."

"The general?"

"I have so named him, for want of something better. Some day he shall select his own name."

"You don't mean to tell me, doctor, that you expect some day to imbue this marble image with actual life. You cannot have convinced yourself of such folly as that."

"Why not? Certainly I believe it. You shall remain here and see it done—if you like."

"But I do not like. Moreover, you will not have an opportunity to do it, I fear; and I begin to think that it will be a charitable act to separate you from your labors for a time."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Have you forgotten the conditions of the truce?"

"No."

"Have you an idea that I do not mean to return here for you?"

"Ah! you mean that, do you?"

"Yes. It is as well to be frank, is it not?"

"Of course. Three hours after you leave here you will turn about and return, will you?"

"Then, or a little later."

"Good. So be it. Three hours after you leave here. Resume your chair again, Carter. As I said before, it is the only comfortable chair in the place. So."

Codman leaned forward as Nick dropped into the chair, and as the detective sank upon the cushions the doctor seized upon one of the arms and gave it a sudden wrench.

As Codman made this entirely unexpected move, the detective attempted to leap to his feet again, but before he could accomplish it, a portion of the arm of the chair that had been wrenched loose swung quickly around in front of him.

An instant later there was a sharp click, and Nick Carter found that he was as thoroughly imprisoned in the chair as if he had been confined in old-fashioned stocks.

For a moment he struggled, but he quickly discovered that he could not hope to break the chair.

Next, he sought to raise his body through the opening, but he realized instantly that the arm which had been moved against his body in front and which imprisoned him, was also provided with sharp, clawlike points which caught in his clothing first, and then which pricked into his flesh when he persisted in his efforts.

In the meantime Codman had stood away at a little distance, silently regarding him; and when at last Nick realized that all effort to escape from his present predicament was useless, the doctor said deprecatingly:

"I am sorry, Carter; I hope you don't consider that I have committed a breach of the truce between us."

"I certainly do," replied Nick. "But it is my own fault. I should have known that you would do it sooner or later."

"And yet," murmured the doctor dreamily, "the terms of our truce were that it was to continue until three hours after we parted. You will bear in mind that we have not parted as yet."

"All that is mere sophistry, Codman."

"I have not injured you in any way; I am merely detaining you here until it pleases me to let you go—and the truce continues until three hours after that time."

"Bah!"

"It is so that I understand the bond."

"Well, what are you going to do next?"

"I shall sit here and chat with you. Your arms are free; will you have a fresh cigar?"

"Yes."

"You are an interesting chap, Carter. You take things coolly."

"You might not think so if I were at liberty."

"Do you suppose that because you overcame me the other night, when we fought together in the mausoleum, that you could do it again?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"I have—many. You conquered me by a trick."

"There are other tricks, Codman."

"Oh, yes. I wish you would forgive me for confining you for a time. I had to do it, for I foresaw that in a few hours you would insist upon taking your leave, and that in three hours after that you would return."

"Precisely."

"I could not permit that, you see. It would not do to have a whim of yours destroy the labor of years. It became necessary to detain you; and that I have succeeded in accomplishing without actually breaking the terms of our compact."

"How long do you intend to keep me here, Codman?"

"I do not know. It is a question which I cannot answer myself."

"Who can answer it, then?"

"The general. He lies yonder."

"Pshaw! You make me tired!"

Codman shrugged his shoulders.

"Nevertheless, I speak the truth," he said. "It all lies with the general."

"A chunk of marble whom you believe can speak to you."

"You have yourself seen that same chunk of marble instinctive with life."

"I have been deceived into *thinking* that I observed such a phenomenon."

"There was no deception practised. It was truth."

"You are yourself deceived."

A flush of anger crept over Codman's face, but it quickly disappeared, and he laughed.

"You are a fool, Carter," he said.

"And you—you are a madman, Codman."

Did the reader ever see an exhibition of anger that was hideous in the revelation of it? If so, some realization can be had of the expression which now swept over Codman's face.

His eyelids narrowed together to slits, and through them the eyes themselves blazed with the fury of a savage beast; his lips parted in a snarl, and he showed his gleaming teeth like the fangs of a wolf; his face went red and then turned as white as chalk, while the hair on his head seemed to bristle upward, just as a cat's tail grows big in anger.

He knew himself and understood himself, and he bent forward with an expression of such utter ferocity that Nick, helpless as he was, was appalled by the storm he had created.

The detective understood it, too, in that moment of danger; for it seemed as if the infuriated doctor would annihilate him then and there—if he could do so; but Nick suddenly remembered the revolvers he carried in his sleeves, and he raised his right arm ready to throw it down and shoot, if the doctor should venture to attack him.

He understood that he had called down this wrath upon him by touching the doctor on a tender spot when he had called him a madman.

The doctor *was* mad; there was no doubt of that. And the doctor knew he was mad; there was also no doubt of that.

He knew of his own madness, and he strove always to conceal it from others; and here, in front of him, was a helpless prisoner who dared to tell him of it.

For a full two minutes this terrible tableau continued: Nick, with his hand raised, ready to throw it forward and fire; the doctor like a coiled steel spring, ready to be released, and prepared to crush everything before it.

It was a moment of intensity which Nick Carter never forgot.

It was a moment fraught with infinite peril for both, for Nick Carter had determined that if Codman made one move in his direction, he would shoot him dead on the spot.

CHAPTER IX.

A MADMAN'S PRISONER.

But it passed, just as all things pass away.

A condition of such tension could not long endure, and this one could not last.

Suddenly the doctor seemed to recover himself.

Such color as he possessed—and it was never more than dimly perceptible—crept slowly back into his face; the eyelids widened; the blazing fire died out of his eyes; his lips loosened themselves over his white teeth; the dilated nostrils reassumed their normal attitude; the long, slender, tapering fingers became motionless, and at last with a deep sigh Codman sank back upon a chair and closed his eyes.

Nick lowered his right hand, and allowed it to rest upon the arm of the chair.

He, too, sighed with relief, for it had been a trying moment; but he watched Codman narrowly, lest there should be a return of the paroxysm.

For a long time after that there was utter silence in the room save for the breathing of the two men; and at last, without uttering a word or glancing toward the detective, Codman left his chair and quietly passed out of the cabin into the night.

Nick watched him go, and said nothing; but after the man had gone he moved his chair with his feet until he had so turned it that it faced the open door.

An hour passed, and Codman had not returned; another, and still he was absent; still more time, and the detective slept—but so lightly that he would be easily awakened.

Still, he did not open his eyes again until the sunlight of another day was streaming upon the tops of the trees in the ravine.

Then he looked hastily around him, but quickly discovered that the doctor had not yet returned.

Hour after hour passed after that in that silent cabin, and the sun climbed and climbed until it was almost at the meridian; until its rays streamed in through the open door, but still Codman did not come.

Nor was the detective idle all this time.

With his first waking moment he had sought in his pockets for that small case of tools which he always carried with him; tools which were carried inside the hollow handle; tools which were themselves no larger than those of an ordinary knife, but which were made of the finest of steel; tools which had stood him in good stead many a time, and which just now were more precious than ever.

He had great difficulty in getting it from owing to the

position he occupied in the chair, but he succeeded at last.

It was a little saw that he wanted, for the bar across the chair in front of him which held him a prisoner was of oak.

When he had withdrawn the saw, and fixed it in its place in the handle, he at once began to work, and you can believe that it was no slight task to saw through a solid piece of seasoned oak, an inch and one-eighth in thickness and eight inches across with an instrument so delicate.

But he sawed and sawed, and the doctor did not return.

Minutes lengthened into hours, and still he worked on, realizing that he was very hungry and even more thirsty.

He believed that after he had sawed through one side of the oak arm, that with his great strength he could break the opposite loose and thus free himself.

In this idea, however, he discovered that he was mistaken.

Under different circumstances he could have accomplished it; but, seated as he was with no purchase to obtain against the effort, he found that it was impossible; and so there was nothing for him to do but to begin over again with the saw at his left side.

And so it was that so many hours passed.

Thus it was that it was almost noon before the task was completed, and he raised his stiffened body from the chair and crossed the room to a bucket of water from which he had seen Codman refresh himself.

He drank long and deeply, and it refreshed him greatly, and then he turned, facing the door, and paused.

He was wondering which he should do; wondering if it were better to make his escape from the cabin and to give Codman that three hours' grace, or if he should wait where he was for the doctor's return and capture him then and there.

But it was Nick Carter's pride that he never broke his word in letter or in spirit.

Because Codman had failed him—or had, by a subterfuge, avoided a part of the obligations of his contract—Nick saw in that no reason to excuse himself for breaking his word.

Therefore he did not long remain in doubt.

"It shall go as it stands," he said to himself; and he turned to a table whereon there was paper and a pencil, and wrote, after glancing at his watch:

"It is now high noon. Our truce endures until three o'clock. I live up to the spirit of our agreement if you do not. NICK CARTER."

He turned away then, and was moving toward the door when his eyes fell upon the sheet-covered object that was lying upon the bench.

A spirit of investigation seized upon him.

"What will be the appearance of that object in the full light of day?" he asked himself.

Three quick strides took him to a position beside it.

For one instant, then, he hesitated; and then with a sudden motion he jerked the sheet aside and cast it upon the floor.

A perfect, if gigantic, model of a man was stretched before him.

No sculptor had ever wrought more splendidly, or more perfectly.

It had the face and form of a giant Apollo with a touch of Hercules thrown in.

It was as white as the driven snow. It was as hard as adamant.

He reached out his hand and touched it.

It was cold, and it gave forth all the sensations of touching stone.

"What fiend possessed me to make me believe that I saw this thing move last night?" he asked himself. "What an exquisitely beautiful piece of work!"

The hair on the head of the image, which last night in the light of the lamp he had supposed to be of tawny hue, was now merely carved marble, done into waves.

The arms of the image, which he had supposed he saw the doctor raise and lower time after time with rhythmic motion, were now stiff, and cold, and hard—in a word, they were stone.

He had supposed that he saw the image sitting upright, but plainly this thing of stone could not bend.

What, then, was the mystery about it?

Nick forgot, in the interest he felt in his surroundings, that the doctor might return at any moment; but at last, with a sigh, he picked up the sheet again and threw it over the statue.

Then, with one last glance around him, he passed rapidly to the door, and so on out of the cabin into the open air.

He found the path down which he had climbed so carefully last night, and exercising great caution lest he should encounter the doctor unawares, he climbed to the top, and presently came out upon the ledge where he had left the automobile.

Then he stared in perplexity.

The automobile was no longer there. It had disappeared.

"It is plain," he thought to himself, "that the doctor has gone for a ride, and that he has helped himself to my machine. It is also possible that he has no intention of returning at all; and yet, I do not believe that he would consent to leave his graven image behind him. No; he has gone to execute some errand, and it is time that he was returning. The question is, shall I wait for him?"

But the question was answered for him.

At the moment he asked it, he heard afar off the sound of the car approaching him, and he stepped into the thicket, concealed himself, and waited.

After a little the noises made by the approaching automobile ceased, and he was wondering why, when suddenly the tall, lithe figure of the doctor came into view.

He was approaching rapidly, and—if the expression of his face was an indication—anxiously.

He glanced neither to the right nor left, but made directly for the head of the pathway, and disappeared down it toward the cabin.

"Good!" the detective told himself. "Codman has left the machine farther back on the road. It makes it all the easier for me. I will keep my word, and give him the three hours."

He dashed away on a run, and ten minutes later, after he had covered about a quarter of a mile, he came upon the car, not only drawn up beside the road through the forest, but it had been turned about so that it faced in the direction which Nick wished to take.

"One might think that he arranged it so, purposely for my use," thought the detective; and then he smiled as he added, "or for his own. But I must hurry. A man can travel almost as fast as an automobile over this frightful road."

He leaped inside the car, and smiled when he remembered that he had the spark plug in his pocket.

"The doctor must have a supply of his own," he told himself; "and in that case he can be used away with him. Fortunately, my work is handy."

In another moment he had started, and he made all the speed he dared to employ over such a road, for he had no doubt that the doctor would pursue him the moment he discovered the escape.

In this he was not mistaken.

He had passed the worst part of the going, and was just entering upon a stretch of better road, when he heard a shout behind him.

For one brief instant he turned his head, and in that instant he could see Codman running toward him with all the speed he could muster.

Had he approached so near ten minutes earlier he must have won in the race, for Nick had been obliged to move very slowly; now, however, the conditions were changed.

The road was comparatively good, and Nick had no difficulty in distancing his pursuer.

But the doctor still chased him; still kept up an incessant calling out to him to stop, to wait.

"Carter! Carter! Wait! Wait! For God's sake, wait! I will apologize! We will renew the truce! It shall be as you say! Wait! Wait! You destroy my last hope! It will kill me! Carter! Carter! I might have killed you last night, but I did not!"

It was thus that he called and continued to call as long as the car was within hailing distance, and even after that, the detective did not doubt.

But Nick kept steadily on, and as steadily gained.

Gradually the doctor was left behind, and at last a bend in the road lost him to view.

The detective wondered why Codman had not fired at him. He knew that the doctor was armed.

"Can it be possible that he respects the truce?" thought Nick; but he smiled at the mere thought of such a thing.

At last he came out upon the main road, where it was smooth and level, and here, the highway being deserted, he put the car at its best speed, and he was soon gliding along like an arrow from a bow.

He knew perfectly well where he was now, in the daylight, and he made for the nearest village, where he also knew he would find a telephone, for he realized what Chick's anxiety would be.

But it was Patsy who replied to him when he called. Chick, he said, had already gone out to search for traces of his chief.

"I'm all right, Patsy," said Nick. "What I want you to do is this: Telephone to Charles Wridgway for the fastest machine he has got, then find Chick and bring him here. I want you to be here by three o'clock, if it is a possible thing to make it. If you cannot find Chick within an hour, come without him. Understand?"

"You bet! I'll be there!" was the instant reply.

CHAPTER X.

A MONSTER OF THE FOREST.

The detective also directed Patsy to set the sergeant free, to tell him that he had already explained his protracted absence to his chief, and to warn him that it would be best for his own interests to say as little as possible about his enforced detention in the house of the dictator.

And then he set himself to wait until the allotted three hours of the truce had passed, for at three o'clock, whether Patsy had arrived or not, he was determined to return to the ravine in search of the doctor.

The detective's idea was that Codman would never wholly desert his marble statue.

He regretted now that he had not thought to discover something about the weight of the image while he was in the cabin. It had not occurred to him to do that. He had trusted solely to his eyes and to his sense of touch to discover of what material it was formed.

Nor could he divest his mind of the puzzle relative to the occurrences of the preceding night.

He could still see before him in his mind's eye that remarkable spectacle of the doctor raising and lowering those arms of marble with rhythmic motion; he could still see that gigantic body sitting upright on the bench, with the jaws working and the muscles heaving; and he could account for it in only one way, which was that there was an element of hypnotic power about it by which and through which he had been made to believe that he saw something which had not occurred at all.

Not that he considered himself at all a subject for hypnotic influence; but, nevertheless, he recalled an incident that had happened in India years before when he had seen one of the fakirs perform that marvelous trick wherein the operator throws a rope into the air which appears to remain there, clinging to nothing, and where afterward a boy apparently climbs the rope until he disappears utterly from view.

That boy—because he had one day been convinced where he was not under the influence of the fakir—that there was in reality no rope and no boy, but it was merely hypnotic influence which compelled spectators to believe these were, and he also had his own experiences of the preceding night could be explained in the same manner.

It was a small country hotel where he was stopping where he awaited the arrival of Chick and Patsy, and he passed a part of the time in disposing of a hearty meal, of which he stood very much in need.

It was after two o'clock when that was done, so he had only little more than a half-hour to wait—if his assistants were to arrive on time.

It was, however, almost ten minutes past three before he heard the droning of an approaching automobile, and he had just determined to leave a note, and start on ahead.

But he waited now, and presently Patsy and Ten-Ichi arrived together; Chick was not there.

"We will leave this machine here and take mine," he said, as soon as they had exchanged greetings, and he had in as few words as possible explained all that had happened to him.

It was half-past three before they were finally started; but they made good time to the point where the turn was made into the road through the forest; and it was half-past four when they finally stopped upon the ledge of rock above the ravine, where Nick had left his machine upon the occasion of his first visit there.

"Now, lads," he said, as they got down and were preparing to descend the pathway into the glen, "one of you must remain here on guard, and the other goes with me. I know that you both desire to accompany me, so the best way to settle it will be to flip a coin."

"All right, sir," they said in unison.

"Patsy, I will give you heads; Ten-Ichi, yours will be tail;" and the detective spun a coin in the air.

"Ten-Ichi goes with me; Patsy remains here," he said, as he looked at it. "If we should happen to need you, Pat, you can easily hear us call, and, if we do, you have only to follow the path to the bottom of the ravine and turn to the right when you get there. Come along, Ten-Ichi."

He led the way into the glen, with Ten-Ichi following, and presently the log cabin was before them.

As they passed around to the front of it, Nick saw that the door was closed, and apparently fastened, and that a heavy board shutter concealed the window.

Without hesitation the detective stepped forward and rapped loudly against the door; but there came no response whatever to his summons.

He rapped again and again, several times, and at last, turning to Ten-Ichi, he said:

"I think that our bird has flown, although it is possible that he may be inside."

It was only an ordinary lock which fastened the door, and Nick quickly picked it; and then as he pushed the door ajar he stepped back quickly, for it was not illogical to suppose that the doctor might be waiting inside the house to attack them.

However, there was no demonstration of any kind.

The interior of the house was as silent as a grave, and almost as dark.

Perceiving this, Nick stepped quickly inside and threw open the shutter at the window; and then Ten-Ichi followed him.

The detective's first glance was toward the bench upon which the image had rested; and he breathed a sigh of relief when he discovered that the sheet was still there, and that it apparently still covered the sleeping giant.

But when he stepped forward and withdrew the sheet he started back in dismay, for the image had disappeared, and in its place were a few rolls of burlap and old clothing placed there, evidently to make it appear that the sheet still covered the statue.

Again did Nick have reason to regret that he had not thought to test the weight of the sleeping giant when he had the opportunity; but regrets were useless now. The image had disappeared, and it was evident that the doctor had found some means of removing it unaided.

With the sole exception of the disappearance of the statue, the interior of the cabin was in the same condition in which the detective had left it; and now he pointed to the chair in which he had been a prisoner, and from which he had sawed himself to liberty.

"That is where he had me, Ten Ichi," he said. "What he would have done with me if I had not escaped, I cannot say."

"It's a fair proposition that he would have murdered you before he was through," replied Ten Ichi.

"Well, we will let that pass. The present question is: How did he get away from here and manage to take that image with him?"

Ten Ichi grinned.

"I can't think of but one way," he said. "That is, if the statue is as big and as heavy as you thought it was."

"What is that?"

"Why, he has brought it to life again, and it walked away."

Nick turned quickly and smiled into Ten-Ichi's eyes.

"It is possible, my lad, that you are making fun of your chief?" he asked, with mock solemnity.

"I was—and yet I was more than half in earnest, too," replied the young Jap.

"More than half in earnest, Ten-Ichi? Tell me exactly what you mean."

For a time Ten-Ichi was silent; then he said:

"Chief, would you mind very much if I do not explain exactly what I mean—just yet? Would you mind if we should search the ground around this cabin first, to see if there are any signs of a trail?"

"No; come along."

They passed outside the cabin and stood there at the door a moment, endeavoring to determine which direction Codman would have taken in making his escape from the cabin, for they were already satisfied that he had not ascended the path to the top of the cliff.

With that direction eliminated, there were only two others that he could have followed.

He had either turned up the ravine, or down it. But which?

It will be remembered that the floor of the ravine where the cabin was located was of smooth, unimpressionable rock.

"We will go down the ravine a little way first," said the detective; and he led the way in that direction.

But they had gone only three or four hundred yards when they came to the edge of a precipice, where the stream that flowed through the ravine fell a distance of forty feet or more to the rocks below.

"It is a safe proposition that he did not take this direction," said Nick, coming to a halt. "We will return and try the other one."

They passed the cabin again, and after covering a hundred yards they came to a place where the rocky floor ended, and where they passed to one side of the stream, and so found themselves upon a pathway of soft earth.

It was Ten-Ichi who was in advance now, and he paused suddenly, with a sharp exclamation, and pointed toward the ground in front of him.

"Look!" he said.

"What is it?" asked the detective.

"Look!" repeated Ten-Ichi; and with surprise and consternation which he did not attempt to conceal, the detective did look.

Before them, deeply imbedded in the soft soil, was the imprint of a naked foot, so large that none less than a giant in stature could have left it there; and leading directly up the ravine, were others, showing as

[illegible] between them that the man or the thing that had made them had taken giant strides.

[illegible] the first moment of surprise was past, Nick Carter [illegible] down on his hands and knees, and examined the [illegible] footprints one after another until he had studied [illegible] of them, and when he at last stood erect again he said:

"Ten-Ichi, there is one interesting and rather remarkable thing about those footprints."

"What is it?" asked the assistant.

"The foot that made them was hard and stiff; not [illegible]le, like the foot of a man. If a natural foot had made them, the toes would have bent down and dug themselves into the soil in places."

Ten-Ichi nodded.

"Those footprints are not like that," the detective continued. "The foot that left these marks here was firm and hard, as if it were made of stone, or iron."

"Or aluminum," said Ten-Ichi.

"Eh?" said the detective. "What do you mean by that?"

"Do you remember, chief," asked Ten-Ichi, "that while we were inside the cabin, when I suggested that the image might have walked away and you thought I was making fun, that I told you that I was more than half in earnest?"

"Yes; go on."

"And do you recall the fact that Codman told you that he had traveled in Tibet?"

"Yes."

"When I was a mere boy at home, I was the pupil of a wise old Samauri who had been held a prisoner in Tibet during his younger days. He was a prisoner there for years, and he used to tell me many strange tales of things that happened to him there. One of those tales was about an image, or an idol, that walked."

"What is that? What are you talking about?"

"It is true. It was only a clever mechanical device; and the [illegible] who taught me—"

The detective interrupted him with a gesture.

"Hist!" he said.

The words had hardly reached the ears [illegible] of Ten-Ichi, and now both of them leaped [illegible] and stood gazing [illegible] in the direction from which it came.

[illegible] for a moment, when [illegible] consternation of dismay.

Less than thirty yards distant from them, from a dense mass of alders, the giant image which had so puzzled the detective while he was a prisoner in the cabin strode into full view, and came to a stop, facing them.

The gigantic figure was entirely nude, save for a breech-cloth around its loins; and the right arm was extended, pointing threateningly at them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE GIANT.

There was perhaps two second of inactivity following upon the sudden appearance of the mysterious giant; and then Nick Carter suddenly threw up one hand and fired.

Nick Carter's friends know that he is a dead shot; that he may place a bullet wherever he desires it to hit, and the detective knew that this bullet struck the huge, white body directly over the heart.

Nevertheless, the figure did not fall; it did not even stagger, and the only result of the shot was a hollow-sounding laugh; and then, before the detective thought of firing a second time, the apparition—we can think of no other name to apply to it at the present moment—turned and disappeared among the alders again.

Without an instant of hesitation the detective started forward on a run, closely followed by Ten-Ichi.

They reached the alders at the spot where the giant had appeared, and Nick, without stopping, forced his way among them only to discover that within a distance of thirty feet he was face to face with another precipice which extended to a height of twenty feet, and over the top of which the stream which flowed through the ravine came tumbling in a volume of water and foam and spray.

And here, too, the floor of the glen was again of rock, so that the giant [illegible] by means of [illegible] feet.

For an instant the detective paused in dismay, and he asked himself the question:

"How and where and in what manner could the giant have disappeared so suddenly?"

It was unanswerable.

[illegible] frowned upon them on every side.

Where the falls came tumbling over the rocks, the height was twenty feet, at least; on either side they [illegible] a hundred feet in height, and there was no perceptible way of escape from the cul-de-sac thus formed.

Nick thought of the falls, and that possibly [illegible]

might be a place of concealment behind them, and leaving Ten-Ichi; he dashed up the rocks to a point from which he could obtain an unobstructed view behind the falling water.

It needed but one glance to tell him that the giant was not there, and that there was no cavern or grotto behind the falls in which he—can we refer to him as he?—could have concealed himself.

Nevertheless, he was determined to make sure, and although he became thoroughly soaked in the effort, he worked himself along the ledge of rocks until he stood almost behind the fall himself, and knew positively that even a child could not have hidden there.

When he returned to Ten-Ichi he was very quiet and very thoughtful, but the only remark he made was:

"Finish that story you were telling about the Samauri teacher, Ten-Ichi."

"The Samauri who taught me and who told me the tales was a prisoner, as I have said. He was practically a slave in the immediate service of the Grand Lama. The Tibetans are not idol-worshipers, as you know, but nevertheless there were five idols in the palace, each of which, at certain seasons of the year, was supposed to possess virtues peculiarly their own."

"Go on; you interest me."

"One of those idols was called Gumahr. It was a huge affair, made of an unknown metal to the Samauri, but which I now suppose must have been aluminum, for he described it as being very strong and not much heavier than paper. It is possible, chief, that the Tibetans discovered the secret of the manufacture of aluminum many years before it was generally known."

"Yes," said Nick. "It is within my recollection when aluminum was almost a precious metal, so expensive was it to produce. But go on."

"It was necessary that a man should be hidden inside the idol to operate it, and for years my teacher was compelled to do that work. He explained to me that once concealed inside, with the mechanism at his command, he could make the idol walk, could swing its arms and work its jaws, and that whenever he appeared with it before the people, they all fell upon their faces in mortal terror."

"I understand you, Ten-Ichi; but I will let you finish. What more?"

"Nothing more only this Doctor Codman has traveled in that country. He told you that he spent some years there. What is more natural than that he should have returned here with a thorough knowledge of the mechanism of that idol Gumahr, and that he should have manufactured a replica of it for his own uses?"

"I think, Ten-Ichi, that you have hit upon the explanation of this business," said Nick.

"A bit of enamel paint, the use of some plaster of Paris, and other ingredients might easily have given it the outward appearance of having been made from marble, in the cursory examination that you made of it."

"That is quite true, also. But aluminum is not hard enough to stop a bullet."

"No; but the image is large enough so that you might easily have missed the man who was concealed inside of it."

The detective was silent for a long time, and Ten-Ichi did not venture to speak. But at last Nick said:

"I was wondering about two things, Ten-Ichi."

"May I ask what they were, chief?"

"Certainly. I was wondering, first, how Codman could balance the image while he made it walk and do other things, for one thing, but most of all I was trying to determine in my own mind how he managed to make it disappear so utterly and completely. The answer to the last question is, of course, obvious. It is that there is a hiding-place within twenty feet of this spot which we have not had the wit to discover."

"As for the answer to the first question," said Ten-Ichi, "that is easy."

"How so?"

"The image itself is so light, notwithstanding its size, that the man concealed inside has only to balance himself in order to balance the image. If you had thought to test its weight when you saw it there in the cabin you would have discovered all this for yourself."

"Quite true, lad; quite true. And now we come to the second question again."

"Yes."

"We refuse to believe that the thing has wings, but that with a man concealed inside it, it can walk."

"Yes."

"But it hasn't got wings. It cannot fly, so where in blazes has it gone to? How has Codman, who was concealed inside the image when I fired at it, taken it away from this place and so escaped us?"

Ten-Ichi shook his head in perplexity.

"Codman could not have passed us in the glen with-

out being seen by us, and there is absolutely no place from where he could have hidden his own body, let alone the huge frame of the aluminum giant."

Nick paused abruptly in his speech and leaped to his feet.

"I think I have the answer," he said, and started forward toward the base of the falls.

"What is it?" asked Ten-Ichi.

For answer, Nick pointed his finger silently at the basin of deep water, the surface of which was changed into foam by the force of the waterfall which tumbled into it.

"Do you mean that he has gone into the water?" asked Ten-Ichi.

"There is no other place where he could have gone," replied the detective.

"But he would have been drowned," said the assistant.

"Who? The image—or the doctor?" asked Nick, with a strange smile.

"It is possible that the thing could have been rendered water-tight, chief."

"Quite possible. Anyhow, I am going to investigate."

"How?"

"I am going into the water. I am going to the bottom of that pool."

Ten-Ichi leaned forward and tested the temperature of the water.

"It is as cold as ice—almost," he said.

"That makes no difference," replied the detective; and he began to divest himself of his clothing.

Then, down he behind the edge of the ledge of rocks that jutted over the basin, and he himself quickly down into the water until he was entirely immersed; and then he swam from Ten-Ichi and sank out of sight.

He was gone only a moment, when he reappeared and pulled himself out upon the rocks, where he stood for a moment so that the warm sun could shine upon him—the last rays of the afternoon sun that would penetrate into the glen.

"It is very cold," he said. "I am accustoming myself to the temperature. I shall go back in a moment and search the bottom. Don't do anyhow, Ten-Ichi, if I am gone longer than you think I should be."

Without awaiting a reply, he stepped to the edge of the pool and raising his hands over his head he dived with a slight into the foaming water.

Ten-Ichi took out his watch and watched the minute hand, for he knew that under the circumstances time always seemed longer than it really was; and he counted the minutes slowly as they elapsed.

One minute; two minutes; three minutes.

Ten-Ichi closed his watch with a snap and began also to remove his clothing. He felt that the time of his chief's absence was altogether too long.

When he was stripped he did not wait to temper his body to the water, but he dived into depths of it at once, for Ten-Ichi is a wonderful swimmer, and during his boyhood his Samauri instructor had made him bathe in water when the ice had to be broken in order to enter it.

He dived and swam straight for the bottom; and the pool was very deep. But once at the bottom he turned his eyes upward and studied the rocks around him, for the sunlight happened to rest upon the surface of the pool at that moment, and there was sufficient light for him to see comparatively well.

And he discovered the thing for which he searched.

It was a fissure in the rocks which did not extend quite to the surface of the pool; but a fissure nevertheless, and of sufficient breadth to admit of the passage of a horse had one been there to attempt it.

Men think quickly under such circumstances, and instantly Ten-Ichi decided that through that fissure, and there only, could the image have gone, if it had descended into the pool; and through that place only could Nick Carter have disappeared, since there was no sign of him elsewhere in the pool.

He was only the briefest instant in determining these points, and then he impelled his own body forward toward the fissure, entered it, discovered that there was more light beyond, and in another second or two he rose to the surface of a second pool where the water was not agitated; a second pool where the rocks had been worn away in a circular form which was almost like a huge well, and into which centuries ago the waters of the stream he had just left behind him must have fallen.

But that was not all.

Nick Carter was there, standing upon the shelving rock beside the pool, gazing upward at a series of steps which had been cut into the rocks, and where a rope that was fastened somewhere at the top dangled a few feet over the head of the cliff. His feet above his head.

The detective heard Ten-Ichi's approach and turned to greet him.

"Codman has climbed those steps with the aid of the rope, and he has pulled it up after him," he said. "I was just figuring it out. He has probably got outside of his giant and carried it while he was climbing. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, one thing is sure. Without the aid of the rope neither of us can climb that cliff, so the only thing left for us to do is to return. Possibly we can make our way around to the top and so find his trail. Come!"

With the decisive leading the way, they dived again into the pool, and presently they climbed out together where they had left their clothing.

In a few moments they were again fully clad; and then, as they were about to start down, they heard a frightened scream followed by a wild call for help. And the voice was Patsy's.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHASE IN THE WOODS.

It did not take Nick Carter long to reach the foot of the path, and to ascend it to the ledge where Patsy had been left in charge of the automobile, after he heard that cry and the call for help that had followed it, and when he did he discovered Patsy lying at full-length on the rocks, close to the edge of the precipice.

Blood was trickling from a deep cut just above his right temple, and the automobile was no longer there.

For one instant the detective gave to a ball and he feared that the off he could have the getting of the motor; but he was not certain of this and decided it was necessary that he should give his immediate attention to Patsy.

The lad was actively unconscious. Indeed, at the first glance Nick was not sure that he still lived; but a second inspection reassured him.

Patsy had evidently been felled by a heavy blow which had cut a deep gash in his head; but he lived and he breathed—and five minutes later, after a few drops of brandy had been administered to him and his wound had been bathed with cool water, he opened his eyes and looked around him with frightened, disturbed gaze.

"Where is it?" he murmured.

"Where is what?" asked the detective.

"The monster—the giant—the thing that attacked me," he replied, and shuddered at the recollection of his encounter.

"Was it the giant?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"And it frightened you?"

Patsy shuddered again.

"It is only a clever mechanical device, Patsy," explained the detective. And then he told the young assistant all about what they had discovered, and what had happened to Ten-Ichi and himself since they parted.

And it was remarkable how quickly Patsy recovered after that.

"I was asleep," he explained. "The thing came upon me suddenly. I called out, called for help, and then I got a swipe over the head that laid me out. That's all I know."

As soon as Patsy was able to travel, they started in pursuit of the automobile, for Nick knew that Codman would never again return to the ravine.

"I am afraid that the wily doctor has given us the slip—for a time," he said, as they hurried to the direction of the main road. "I wonder if he is using the giant run the machine for him, or if he has packed it in the tonneau."

Ten-Ichi chuckled.

"If he is sitting on the front seat, inside that naked image and should happen to meet anybody on the road, there will be some frightened people in this section of the country," he said; and Nick agreed with him.

At a distance of a hundred yards below they arrived at the main road, they found the automobile where Codman had abandoned it because of the exploded tire. It was evident that he had attempted to make too much speed over the uneven going, and that the punctured tires were the consequence.

"Come," said Nick. "This is not so bad. I think we have got him now, if we are patient."

He at once began a painstaking examination of the road, and he very quickly discovered Codman's trail.

"Follow me, both of you," he said. "The doctor has gotten outside of his image. He must be carrying it, and although it is not heavy it is clumsy. We should have no difficulty in overtaking him now that we know."

The trail was in some places quite easy to follow; in others it was extremely difficult to cling to it.

It took them directly to the main road, and crossed across it into the forest on the opposite side; and then they lost it entirely.

The detective paused for a moment, at a loss what course to pursue. Presently he said:

"There is only one thing to do. We must spread out, Patsy, you go a hundred yards down the road, and then, when I give the signal to start, dive straight into the woods. Ten-Ichi, you go the same distance in the other direction. I will take the center."

Had the time not been in the month of June, and not far from the longest day in the year, it must have been quite dark by this time; as it was there was still more than half an hour of daylight left to them, and Nick was determined to make the most of it.

He was determined to capture Codman if it was a possible thing to accomplish it, for he felt now more forcibly than ever before that the poison-doctor should not be left at large.

His mind recurred to the scenes in the cabin when he was a prisoner in Codman's hands. He recalled all that the doctor had said about the secret of life, and all the things he had done with his mechanical statue; and there was not a doubt in his own mind but that Codman believed that he could transform that statue into a living being.

This, then, was the phase that his dementia had taken. This, then, accounted for all that he had said to the detective, and all that he had done.

Nick believed that he had worked in perfect good faith with himself when he had spent so much time in raising and lowering the arms of the image, and at tempting meanwhile to breathe into it the breath of life.

"He is a mad physician, sane on every subject but one," thought the detective, as he gave the signal to his companions, and started into the woods.

The forest was almost primeval in character. Between the larger growth of trees an almost impenetrable undergrowth flourished, and in many places it was almost all that Nick could do to force his way through it.

Now and then as he advanced he came to a space that was more or less open; and it was just after he had crossed one of these natural clearings that the incident happened which came near to resulting in disaster.

Nick had crossed the partly open space, and had stopped facing a dense mass of undergrowth.

He was determining in his own mind whether he should attempt to force his way through it or, by making a détour, skirt it, and so invest you his mind upon the subject that he did not hear the approach of stealthy footsteps behind him.

Of a sudden something—a heavy body—alighted squarely upon his shoulders, and despite his efforts to maintain his position, he was forced to the ground, and at the same instant a heavy hand with a grip like iron seized him by the throat and effectually choked back all possibility of his crying out to warn his companions.

It has been said that Codman was fully as strong as Nick Carter, if, indeed, he was not even stronger.

The detective was aware of this fact; he realized it thoroughly; and now that he had permitted himself to be taken at a disadvantage his instant thought was that he must struggle as he had never done before if he hoped to gain the mastery of this madman who had attacked him in the rear.

When Codman, having alighted on the detective's back, seized him by the throat, Nick Carter instantly did two things.

He shut his jaws tightly together, and thus distended to their utmost capacity the muscles of his neck, and so offset the effort, to strangle him—and he reached both his hands upward and backward and grasped the hair of Codman's head in each of them.

In that way he pulled the doctor's head down against his own shoulders, and held it there so firmly and so tightly that Codman was in even more danger of being smothered than Nick was of being strangled.

Codman could not strike the detective, for he dared not loosen the grasp upon his throat for one thing, lest Nick would call out to his companions; and he dared not loosen the other arm, which was around Nick's body, lest he should be unhorsed, so to speak.

When Nick fell he fell to his knees; and because both his hands were grasping Codman's hair, he pitched forward until his forehead touched the ground—or, rather, the thick layer of moss which covered the ground; and it can readily be seen that this position placed the doctor somewhat at a disadvantage.

Nick realized it, and he strained himself for a final effort, for he knew that the battle must be won quickly or not at all.

He waited a brief interval while he pulled himself together; and then, putting every ounce of muscle that he possessed into that final effort that he had decided upon, and with his forehead still digging into the moss, he raised himself on a spot one knee and then the other.

Then, counting one, two, three to himself, he gave a mighty jerk with his hands: a jerk that would have torn

Codman's scalp from his head had the man not released his hold around Nick's body.

But he did release it. He could not do otherwise; and having released it, his body described a semicircle in the air.

It flew over Nick Carter's head like a whip-lash, the grip upon Nick's throat was torn away, and Codman himself landed with the small of his back across a fallen tree so that the wind was effectually knocked out of him, and for an instant he lay as one who was gasping away his last breath.

Instantly the detective was upon his feet. Just as suddenly he brought his handcuffs into play, and in two seconds Codman was bound and helpless before his captor.

Then it was that Nick called out to the others, and when they came to him they were astounded to discover that the search was ended.

Codman recovered slowly from the effects of the fall that Nick had given him, and a strange feature of his recovery was that he would not utter a word.

Although Nick talked to him and questioned him, he would make no sound whatever; and although Old Sleuth, and for many days thereafter, the forest around that locality were thoroughly searched, no trace whatever of the mechanical giant could be found. The doctor had succeeded in hiding it so effectually that, so far as we know, it is still hidden.

There was an extra tire with Nick's car, and still another extra one with the car that Patsy had driven to the hotel, and with these they repaired the big Peerless; and so, bound hand and foot so that there was no possibility of his escaping, Doctor Codman, the poisoner, was taken to New York and lodged in a cell at police headquarters.

THE END.

The next number, 515, will contain "The Plot of the Poisoner; or, Nick Carter's Hairbreadth Escape."

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